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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001087

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STATE FOR AF/W
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SUBJECT: KADUNA GOVERNOR BULLISH ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL
PROSPECTS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) During a late July conversation with the Consul General, Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi predicted the presidency would return to the north. Among the Northern governors, Makarfi thought he had the inside track to getting President Obasanjo's approval and clinching the PDP nomination. Makarfi claims a majority of the PDP governors favor a return to the north. Of the contending northern PDP governors -- Adamu of Nassarawa, Mu'azu of Bauchi, Turaki of Jigawa, and Yar'Adua of Katsina -- all have significant handicaps except him. To strengthen his position, Makarfi has been assiduously traversing the country, consulting with key figures in all six of Nigeria's political zones. He has also been careful to consult regularly with President Obasanjo. However, recently Makarfi has gotten a little too comfortable with the media about his presidential ambitions. Attracting too much of the political spotlight could cause the usually cautious Makarfi to run afoul of an irascible President. End summary.

A MAJORITY OF ZONES AGREE THE PRESIDENCY SHOULD GO NORTH

12. (C) In a relaxed recent meeting in Lagos, Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi, accompanied by Idi Farouk, Director General of the National Orientation Agency, told the Consul General he was leading the pack to be President Obasanjo's chosen successor. Makarfi stated that a sitting governor was the most likely successor given the power of the governors within the PDP. He further explained that a majority of the PDP governors favored a successor from the north. Governors from the three northern zones obviously supported a northern candidate, continued Makarfi. A bit more surprisingly, all PDP southwestern governors supported a northern candidate. The Southwest governors recognized the PDP must field a northern candidate to counter Vice President Atiku or former military head-of-state Buhari, contended Makarfi. If the PDP did not field a northerner, it would yield the northern vote to Atiku or Buhari, the southwesterners posit. Believing they could win the North decisively would give Atiku or Buhari greater latitude in selecting a vice-presidential running mate for all that would be required would be to carry one of the three southern geopolitical zones. Conceivably, Atiku or Buhari could set their sights on the Southwest by selecting Lagos Governor Tinubu as a running mate. Should Tinubu be a VP candidate, the PDP Southwest governors fear this could steer the Yorubas to back Tinubu and the slate of

gubernatorial candidates under him. This would be the ruination of the PDP's electoral chance to retain the governorships of the Yoruba Southwest. However, if the PDP picked a northern candidate the north would also be a battleground for votes and Atiku and Buhari would have less of a margin of error when selecting a running mate. If the PDP selected a running mate from the South-South or Southeast, Atiku and Buhari would likely have to follow suit because they would fear the loss of that zone. Thus Tinubu would not rise to the stature of a VP candidate and would not be a strong magnet attracting Yoruba votes away from the PDP in the Southwest. Further buttressing his belief that the presidential nomination will swing north, Makarfi cited several other southern governors who favored a northern president -- Delta State's James Ibori, Edo State's Lucky Igbinedion, and Ebonyi State's Sam Egwu.

...AND IF NORTH, I'M THE MAN, SAYS MAKARFI

13. (C) Makarfi asserted there were few candidates who have a realistic chance. The idea of reconciling the President and Vice President Atiku is now anathema to both men. Abdullahi Adamu of Nassarawa State was unpopular, "a northern Peter Odili" minus the charm, Makarfi quipped. Bauchi State's Adamu Mu'azu removed himself from contention by fumbling the third term, and now was unpopular in his home state. Jigawa State's Saminu Turaki only recently joined the PDP, and has been an absentee governor, Makarfi charged. Even Katsina State's Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, whom Makarfi called a friend, was too unassertive and much too parochial in outlook. Therefore, Makarfi concluded that he would be the only man left standing.

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14. (C) Additionally, Makarfi claimed two other factors bolster his cause with the President. Makarfi and Atiku publicly tiffed several years back, and the encounter earned him the President's favor. Obasanjo occasionally mentions the episode, and congratulated the governor for showing his mettle, revealed Makarfi. Additionally, the President recognizes Kaduna is a complicated state, in some ways a microcosm of Nigeria, with Muslims in the north and Christians in the south. His experience as governor has prepared him for the higher office, Makarfi asserted.

15. (C) Last, Governor Makarfi said he has kept close to the President, consulting him regularly. Makarfi said he always gets Obasanjo's approval before going to other parts of the country or attending major events. Also, he makes sure he gives Obasanjo a full brief of what he picks up during these forays, Makarfi declared.

COMMENT

16. (C) Governor Makarfi was optimistic the PDP presidential nomination would go north, and logically fall to him. Makarfi has skillfully navigated the political currents to remain close to the President. Makarfi is seen as an Obasanjo man, but most people know that this is a matter of strategy and not abject loyalty. However, Makarfi may be inching into the limelight a bit too early. His increased media attention could undo the careful behind-the-scenes cultivation at which he has heretofore performed well. At this stage it is unwise to assume Obasanjo is willing to relinquish most of the spotlight. Perhaps realizing this, Makarfi adjusted his media sights a bit lower over the weekend, releasing a statement that he would be amenable to being a VP to a southern candidate. Not only was that wise because such a statement makes it hard to charge Makarfi with being a northern chauvinist. It also opens the door for Makarfi to supplant Atiku as VP should Obasanjo somehow

revive his third term quest. End comment.
BROWNE